

Event Type: Soap box derby

Incident: Struck by an object

Narrative

On Saturday, July 19, 2008, in Akron, OH a group of 10-14 year old boys and girls were getting ready for the annual soap box derby race. This event had been going on for close to 20 years. It was a fun and exciting tradition that brought thousands of people out to watch. On average, about 30 cars were entered each year. The event was held on a hillside concrete road. The road was shut down for the event the evening before. This was done to prep for the event. People would start showing-up to the event around 7:00 am. The event did not start until 12:00 noon.

Every year the recreation department and city would contract with various vendors for services. For years, they had contracted with a farm to provide hay bales. The farm owner was responsible for lining the street with the hay bales to create a barrier. This year, they had to change vendors. The farm owner and his sons lined the streets with the hay bales the evening before the event. Toward the end of the course the farmer started to run low on hay bales. The farmer decided to separate the hay bales. The hay bales were placed about every 8-10 feet toward the end of the track. The recreation department followed behind them and placed mesh plastic fencing behind the hay bales. The fencing was approximately 24" in height. It was about 10" from the backside of the hay bales and was staked down with 30" wood dowels about every 10 feet. There was a lot of slack in the mesh fence.

The race began at around 12:00 noon --- as planned. The drivers were on their way down the hill. As they closed in on the bottom of the hill they were reaching speeds of 20-25 mph. One of the drivers lost control of his car. He was unable to steer. The car veered to the right and drove between two bales of hay. The vehicle plowed down the mesh plastic fencing and jumped a curb. The vehicle finally came to a halt after crashing into a middle aged woman watching the race from her bicycle. The vehicle crushed both of her legs.

Problem statements

- Should a pre-race inspection have taken place? How often should they take place?
- Who should have performed the inspection(s)?
- What should they have been looking for?
- Should the fence have been taught? How? Could it have prevented the injury?
- How could you prevent the hay bales from moving?
- What kind of viewing options should they have provided for the race? Could it prevent incidents like this?
- Would policies and/or procedures have prevented this? How?
- Who was responsible for this? Why or why not?
- Should future races continue? Why or why not? What would you do differently?
- What should you do for the victim? Who should do it?
- Other...